

'Shall we play a game, or shall I read to you, or what shall it be?' he asked uneasily.

'You read to me,' said Connie.

'What shall I read--verse or prose? Or drama?'

'Read Racine,' she said.

It had been one of his stunts in the past, to read Racine in the real French grand manner, but he was rusty now, and a little self-conscious; he really preferred the loudspeaker. But Connie was sewing, sewing a little frock of primrose silk, cut out of one of her dresses, for Mrs Flint's baby. Between coming home and dinner she had cut it out, and she sat in the soft quiescent rapture of herself sewing, while the noise of the reading went on.

Inside herself she could feel the humming of passion, like the after-humming of deep bells.

Clifford said something to her about the Racine. She caught the sense after the words had gone.

'Yes! Yes!' she said, looking up at him. 'It is splendid.'

Again he was frightened at the deep blue blaze of her eyes, and of her soft stillness, sitting there. She had never been so utterly soft and still. She fascinated him helplessly, as if some perfume about her intoxicated him. So he went on helplessly with his reading, and the throaty sound of the French was like the wind in the chimneys to her. Of the Racine she heard not one syllable.

She was gone in her own soft rapture, like a forest sighing with the dim, glad moan of spring, moving into bud. She could feel in the same world with her the man, the nameless man, moving on beautiful feet, beautiful in the phallic mystery. And in herself in all her veins, she felt him and his child. His child was in all her veins, like a twilight.

*'For hands she hath none, nor eyes, nor feet, nor golden Treasure of hair...'*

She was like a forest, like the dark interlacing of the oakwood, humming inaudibly with myriad unfolding buds. Meanwhile the birds of desire were asleep in the vast interlaced intricacy of her body.

But Clifford's voice went on, clapping and gurgling with unusual sounds. How extraordinary it was! How extraordinary he was, bent there over the book, queer and rapacious and civilized, with broad shoulders and no real legs! What a strange creature, with the sharp, cold inflexible will of some bird, and no warmth, no warmth at all! One of those creatures of the afterwards, that have no soul, but an extra-alert will, cold will. She shuddered a little, afraid of him. But then, the soft warm flame of life was stronger than he, and the real things were hidden from him.

The reading finished. She was startled. She looked up, and was more startled still to see Clifford watching her with pale, uncanny eyes, like hate.

'Thank you *so* much! You do read Racine beautifully!' she said softly.

'Almost as beautifully as you listen to him,' he said cruelly. 'What are you making?' he asked.

'I'm making a child's dress, for Mrs Flint's baby.'

He turned away. A child! A child! That was all her obsession.

'After all,' he said in a declamatory voice, 'one gets all one wants out of Racine. Emotions that are ordered and given shape are more important than disorderly emotions.'